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Historical Society of Palm Desert

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The Hourglass

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FIRE SAFETY FOR THIRD GRADERS

In a recent interview Palm Desert City Councilman Dick Kelly congratulated the Historical Society of Palm Desert on the successful conclusion of the third annual Mini-Muster. This event was held on three successive days beginning October 10 at three local elementary schools: Abraham Lincoln, Gerald Ford and George Washington.

The Mini-Muster is a fireman's term for a group training activity, and it was presented as part of fire prevention week. The goals of the program include bringing fire safety to life for youngsters and educating them on the importance of fire safety. The Mini-Muster is sponsored by the Historical Society with the cooperation of the schools and the donated time of the Cove Community Fire Station.

Councilman Kelly, who attends this function each year, declared the Mini-Muster '95 was "bigger and better" in every way. Kelly has a keen, personal interest in safety as a public good, and he strongly supports the program which involves third graders from the three elementary schools in the Desert Sands Unified School District.

The students participate in 10 events staged to mimic the actual training given to professional fire fighters. The action, scaled down for the children, included an escape from a smoke filled room while blindfolded, a hose drag, a bucket brigade and other team exercises timed to create the sense of emergency that would occur if the situation were real. Other activities included the chance to explore real fire trucks and emergency vehicles.

THE BUCKET BRIGADE

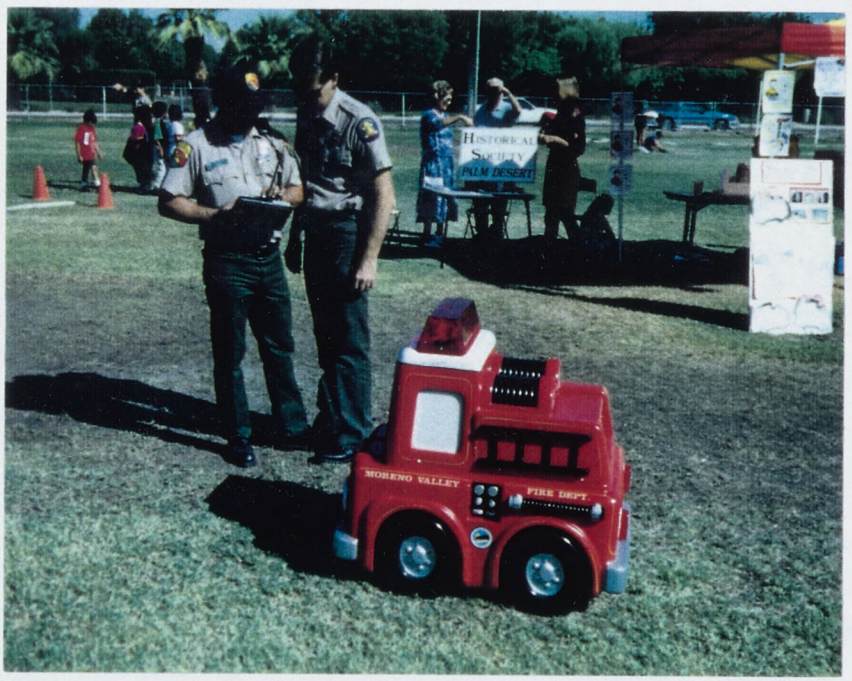
In his college days Kelly was a volunteer with the fire department in Visalia. He recalled vivid memories of sleeping in the station, jumping into pants and boots, sliding down the pole and buttoning his jacket

on the run. Little attention was paid in those years, he said, to safety equipment to protect firefighters from injury and smoke inhalation.

Later, as an Air Force Pilot, Kelly learned more about preparedness and the confidence and proficiency that comes from emergency practice. Drill, drill, drill is the key to readiness when danger strikes. Speaking of the strong correlation between memory and what was pleasurable to learn, Kelly noted the enthusiasm of the children for the format of Mini-Muster. "You'll never know how many lives may be saved," he stated, "as a result of this early training."

The joy the children take in the individual games and in the team exercises is shared by the wonderful crew of firemen from Fire Station #33, part of the Riverside County Fire Department, headed by Capt. Yazloff. The three-dimensional folding wooden display props and other instructional aids were constructed by the firemen. A great addition in use this year was a piece of equipment on loan from Moreno Valley. The antics and voice commands of a miniature fire engine, nicknamed "Little Squirt", delighted the children.

Councilman Kelly has declared his intention to promote the purchase of a "Little Squirt" so that Fire Station #33 will have one for use next year. We are counting on the Councilman !! The man who was instrumental in bringing natural gas buses for cleaner air in the desert will certainly secure this new piece of equipment for the kids. They have a great champion in Councilman Kelly. We're glad he is on their side and on ours!



FIREMEN WITH "LITTLE SQUIRT"

Over 1000 children have had this valuable training. In addition to the fun of the day, each student received a signed Certificate of Completion of Fire Safety Training. The Historical Society presents the schools with awards and the firemen, along with their mascots Sparky and Smokey the Bear, give the participants fire prevention items that promote fire safety.

Mini-Muster activities conclude at the Old Fire House on El Paseo on the last Sunday in October with a reception honoring the fire fighters who help. Student art work, poems and letters are on display and the young artists are recognized.

Historical Society stalwarts, Barbara and Dan Callahan, head up this superb organizational effort. Many thanks, B. J. and Danny!

Carolyn Berkey has been a desert resident since 1946 and has made her home in Palm Desert for the past twenty years. She is an active volunteer for a number of organizations, including the Eisenhower Auxiliary, the Y.M.C.A. and the Blood Bank.....to name a few. Elected to the board of the Historical Society in 1994, she shares family memories with us.

RECOLLECTIONS FROM THE BERKEY FAMILY

Our arrival in the Coachella Valley in 1946 from Beverly Hills was a horrendous experience.....in the beginning. The day we arrived with the movers, we were greeted with a most severe sandstorm. I thought the world was coming to an end, and when I looked in the mirror I was sure it had.

Our Ranch on Avenue 81, about twenty miles south of Indio, was in a beautiful setting with surrounding grape vineyards, date gardens and citrus groves. We overlooked the Salton Sea on the east with the mountains on the west. It took a while to adjust to being so isolated.

One day Helen Wilson (Mrs. Warren) arrived to welcome us and to invite me to help her with the Red Cross fund-raising drive. That was the beginning of my volunteer activities in the valley. Then Crystal and Leland Yost, whose ranch was within five miles of ours, became close friends. Eventually we formed a "needlework" group with Dorothy Dunlap, Lucy Laflin, Helen, Crystal and myself. We met monthly, rotating at each home for luncheon and sharing all kinds of interesting news and recipes.

We also enjoyed our gracious Japanese neighbors. Our children, Valentine and George III, have fond memories of hours of playing together. I never heard the mother raise her voice. Upon occasions when our irrigation was out of control, the Tanaguchis, our nearest neighbor, would call to apologize because their young seedlings were being drowned. They were truly an example for all of us.

When my sister visited us for the first time, she met Dean Condor while shopping in Coachella. He invited all of us to St. John's church Easter party to be held at Isabelle Jake's home in Thermal. That was the beginning of a very warm and important time in

our lives. It was always a challenge to arrive on time for Sunday School, but eventually the long drive became shorter.

After the sale of the Ranches, it was decided to move closer to the children's activities and Point Happy in La Quinta was selected. At this time Leland Yost was prevailing upon George to run for Riverside County Supervisor, or to seek the appointment to fulfill Homer Varner's term. Leland felt the time had come when the farmers needed more representation within the county. This was a position which needed to be explored. After many interviews and consultations, George decided he would welcome the opportunity to serve the community on a higher level. This proved to be an exciting experience in many ways, as there were a number of other candidates applying. Then the announcement was made by Governor Goodwin Knight.....George had been selected! Our life was changed. Before long we were organizing for the election and Jim O'Brien joined our campaign as Treasurer. (Two elected terms followed - Ed. note.)

One event which I often recall: George was asked to give a graduation address at Palm Valley School. The title was "Why Do We Grow Old So Soon and Smart So Late?"

Now the years are slipping by and some of our happiest memories are the times and celebrations spent at the Shadow Mountain Club. Our son, George, learned to swim there before he could walk and Valentine's birthday parties were so special.

George's doctors were advising him to become less active -- but he continued on -- and became a founder of St. Margaret's Church. The thought of retiring was never a concept.....there was so much to be done!

Our grandchildren, Christian, Heather, Andrew and Patrick love to visit Palm Desert. The highlight always has been eating out at Keedy's Restaurant.

ANNUAL MEETING - OCT. 25, 1995

Shadow Mountain Resort and Racquet Club was the site of the general membership meeting for the Historical Society of Palm Desert. Members and guests gathered around the historic fireplace of the Wimbledon Room for pastries and coffee prior to the meeting.

President Bob Keedy welcomed the group, made introductions and presented Fay Bowie with a lifetime honorary board membership. Fay was unable to attend in the spring when she won the Clifford Henderson Founder's Day Award, so her presence in October was warmly applauded.

Following a recap of past year activities, Bob did a reprise of historic slides from fifty years ago. Palm Desert presented a much different landscape in the 40s and 50s. Bob's narration and recollections from the audience generated a pleasant, nostalgia bond among the old timers present. It was an eye opener for some of the newer folk who had not grasped the fast pace of development over a half century. Only yesterday, it seems, children were enjoying rides with Andy the Donkey Man. In a few more years, a Metro Link Station may be sited in our city to connect us to the larger southern California community.

Mayor Buford Crites and Councilmen Walt Snyder, Dick Kelly and Bob Spiegel were on hand to supply additional information on highlights from the past and to point us toward the future. Mayor Crites shared the plan which has been approved to plant a six-acre working date garden at the Civic Center.

P.S. New membership pins were distributed to board members. The pins are available to general membership, as well, at a cost of $5.00 each. Please call the Society office to order yours.....346-6588. Name identification helps when confronted with that oh-so familiar, but unplaceable face.

WHERE WERE YOU THIS SUMMER?

Summer travels took several members to other climes. President Bob Keedy, son Doug, and daughter Barbara Eastes did a step back into family history. They visited the old 1200-acre ranch near Paso Robles formerly owned by the family. It was known to the younger Keedys only by photographs. They enjoyed seeing the ranch, visiting family, etc. ..... Ed and Ginny Mullins had a cool two-week getaway to Lake Tahoe. ..... Gary Olesen spent a mostly working summer in Idaho, bringing a commercial/residential project closer to ground breaking after the winter season. Gary's mother, Dolly, was in Portland for six weeks, so they were able to spend some time together. ..... Dick and Ginny Folkers just returned from a fine week in the Bay area. It was a League of California Cities conference for Dick. They fitted in family visits while there. ..... Jean Martin said she went NO PLACE, but she's anticipating a trip to Florida and "doing" Disneyworld for her granddaughter's 7th birthday. .....Roger and Maria Keezer completed the 22-mile Cactus to Clouds hike from Palm Springs to San Jacinto Peak on October 28. They are among the distance hikers of the Coachella Valley Hiking Club.

NEW MEMBER

Joan Schiffling (center) is being welcomed by President Bob Keedy (left) and Past-President Dan Callahan (right).

Joan, recently retired Gerald Ford School Principal, joined the Desert Sands Unified School District fourteen years ago when she and her engineer husband, Villi, moved to the desert.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Margaret Ritzel
E. Wayne & Alla Everhart
Geri Mech
Villi & Joan Schiffling
Adele & Edward Ruxton

MEMORIAL GIFT

Honoring Anne Carpenter, from Margo Ernst

The Honorary Board Membership conferred on Fay Bowie at the annual meeting places her in a select group of senior advisors. Others who hold the title are Marian Henderson, Rheo Lawman and Florence Maxwell.

Material comes to the archives in round about ways. Recently, desert pamphlets received from Mrs. J. O. Yungfleisch II of Rancho Mirage had been sent to her by her sister, a librarian at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina.

NEEDED - photos of the old Firecliff Lodge which was torn down about twenty years ago. Please, there must be someone out there with pictures.

REFURBISHING AT HEADQUARTERS

Have you seen the new sign at the Society office? The old one self-destructed. Color seeped through from an earlier mounting, obliterating the lettering. The new sign avoids that problem; besides, it looks great! The sliding screen door has been replaced, thanks to Jean Martin, again.

We're trying a new logo on the Hourglass Newsletter. Please give us your comments.

Members have been selling raffle tickets on the prizes offered by the Golf Cart Parade committee. If November is here, can the holidays be far behind? Many good wishes for Thanksgiving and all the year-end festivities. Peace for the Christmas celebration.

"Hourglass" Editor, Theda Lundquist